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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PARM](#) [ETTC](#) [FR](#) [IR](#) [EU](#)
SUBJECT: FRENCH NEA A/S EQUIVALENT ON IRAN, SEPTEMBER 17

REF: A. SEPTEMBER 17

[B](#). 2007
[C](#). PARIS POINTS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

[1](#). (C) We used a September 17 meeting with French MFA NEA A/S Equivalent Jean Felix-Paganon to ask for his take on French FM Kouchner's statements in an interview the previous day on the possibility of war with Iran as part of the ongoing crisis over that country's nuclear program (summarized in ref). Felix-Paganon quickly responded that France's position remains doing everything possible diplomatically to avoid a military confrontation. The MFA spokesperson, he added, would stress that point at the Quai's daily press briefing.

[2](#). (C) Felix-Paganon stated that preliminary discussions with EU members had not been promising in terms of agreeing to a common position on next steps regarding sanctions. France, as the government has stated publicly, wants the EU to be ready to impose sanctions at the European level in the event the UNSC cannot agree to further sanctions of its own. As reported in the media, Felix-Paganon referred to the unilateral freeze on further exploration or expansion of existing activities in the Iranian gas and oil sectors by French firms.

[3](#). (C) Turning to the question of UNSC follow-up, Felix-Paganon argued that we were starting to confront incredibly difficult obstacles to setting up and maintaining a truly effective sanctions regime. He went beyond Russian and Chinese objections in the UNSC to contend that Dubai was one of our biggest problems in terms of applying sanctions against Iran. He wondered whether the UAE would give its word that it could close down this vital commercial lifeline to Iran and how we and the rest of the international community could monitor compliance. Felix-Paganon recalled the troubled history of recent sanctions -- notably against Iraq and the former Yugoslavia -- and called the challenge of creating an enforcement mechanism and ensuring that it worked properly daunting. We are at the stage where applying punitive measures to large banks was the easy part; Felix-Paganon worried about closing up the myriad loopholes that invariably exist, and forcing a very dynamic financial sector to police itself well enough to make sanctions work. He doubted much of this was possible but underscored that France is working toward stronger sanctions nonetheless.

[4](#). (C) Comment: The MFA is not the first or the last word with respect to sanctions policy in the GOF, and we hope to press for more clarity on next steps later this week with presidential adviser for strategic affairs Francois Richier. Felix-Paganon, a former IO director in the late 1990s/early 21st century with strong memories of our clashes over Iraq sanctions, likely reflects the caution and prudence of French

politicians and bureaucrats more cautious and less blunt than Kouchner -- or Kouchner's boss, President Sarkozy. We note that PM Fillon, whose reputation is very much that of a careful politician, has been quoted September 17 as saying "Everything must be done to avoid war." While agreeing with Kouchner's warning that the situation was dangerous and should be taken seriously, Fillon affirmed that "France's role is to lead towards a peaceful solution to a situation that would be extremely dangerous for the rest of the world."

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